waiting to come into bloom; it was a pastoral country on the verge of entering the twentieth century as a modern society, with all the benefits and ills of such a transformation. Its colonization by the Zionist movement turned this process into a disaster for the majority of the native people living there.

Chapter 2

The Jews Were a People Without a Land

The claim in the previous chapter, that Palestine was a land without people, goes hand in hand with the claim that the Jews were a people without a land.

But were the Jewish settlers a people? Recent scholarship has repeated doubts expressed many years ago about this as well. The common theme of this critical point of view is best summarized in Shlomo Sand's *The Invention of the Jewish People*.[1] Sand shows that the Christian world, in its own interest and at a given moment in modern history, supported the idea of the Jews as a nation that must one day return to the holy land. In this account, this return would be part of the divine scheme for the end of time, along with the resurrection of the dead and the second coming of the Messiah.

The theological and religious upheavals of the Reformation from the sixteenth century onwards produced a clear association, especially among Protestants, between the notion of the end of the millennium and the conversion of the Jews and their return to Palestine. Thomas Brightman, a sixteenth-century English clergyman, represented these notions when he wrote, "Shall they return to Jerusalem again? There is nothing more

certain: the prophets do everywhere confirm it and beat about it."[2] Brightman was not only hoping for a divine promise to be fulfilled; he also, like so many after him, wished the Jews either to convert to Christianity or to leave Europe all together. A hundred years later, Henry Oldenburg, a German theologian and natural philosopher, wrote: "If the occasion present itself amid changes to which human affairs are liable, [the Jews] may even raise their empire anew, and . . . God may elect them a second time."[3] Charles-Joseph of Lign, an Austro-Hungarian field marshal, stated in the second half of the eighteenth century:

> I believe that the Jew is not able to assimilate, and that he will constantly constitute a nation within a nation, wherever he may be. The simplest thing to do would in my opinion be returning to them their homeland, from which they were driven.[4] As is quite apparent from this last text, there was an obvious link between these formative ideas of Zionism and a more longstanding anti-Semitism.

François-René de Chateaubriand, the famous French writer and politician, wrote around the same time that the Jews were "the legitimate masters of Judea." He influenced Napoleon Bonaparte, who hoped to elicit the help of the Jewish community in Palestine, as well as other inhabitants of the land, in his attempt to occupy the Middle East at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He promised them a "return to Palestine" and the creation of a state.[5] Zionism, as we can see, was therefore a Christian project of colonization before it became a Jewish one.

The ominous signs of how these seemingly religious and mythical beliefs might turn into a real program of colonization and dispossession appeared in Victorian Britain as early as the 1820s. A powerful theological and imperial movement emerged that would put the return of the Jews to Palestine at the heart of a strategic plan to take over Palestine and turn it into a Christian entity. In the nineteenth century, this sentiment became ever more popular in Britain and affected the official imperial policy: "The soil of Palestine . . . only awaits for the return of her banished children, and the application of industry, commensurate with agricultural capabilities, to burst once more into universal luxuriance, and be all

that she ever was in the days of Solomon."[6] Thus wrote the Scottish peer and military commander John Lindsay. This sentiment was echoed by David Hartley, an English philosopher, who wrote: "It is probable that the Jews will be reinitiated in Palestine."[7]

The process was not wholly successful before it received the support of the United States. Here, too, there was a history of endorsing the idea of a Jewish nation having the right to return to Palestine and build a Zion. At the same time as Protestants in Europe articulated these views, they appeared in a similar form across the Atlantic. The American president, John Adams (1735–1826), stated: "I really wish the Jews again in Judea as an independent nation."[8] A simple history of ideas leads directly from the preaching fathers of this movement to those with the power to change the fate of Palestine. Foremost among them was Lord Shaftesbury (1801–85), a leading British politician and reformer, who campaigned actively for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. His arguments for a greater British presence in Palestine were both religious and strategic.[9]

As I will presently show, this dangerous blend of religious fervor and reformist zeal would lead from Shaftesbury's efforts in the middle of the nineteenth century to the Balfour Declaration in 1917. Shaftesbury realized that it would not be enough to support the return of the Jews, and they would have to be actively assisted by Britain in their initial colonization. Such an alliance should start, he asserted, by providing material help to the Jews to travel to Ottoman Palestine. He convinced the Anglican bishopric center and cathedral in Jerusalem to provide the early funding for this project. This would probably not have happened at all had Shaftesbury not succeeded in recruiting his father in law, Britain's foreign minister and later prime minister, Lord Palmerston, to the cause. In his diary for August 1, 1838, Shaftesbury wrote:

> Dined with Palmerston. After dinner left alone with him. Propounded my schemes, which seems to strike his fancy. He asked questions and readily promised to consider it [the program to help the Jews to return to Palestine and take it over]. How singular is the order of Providence. Singular, if estimated by man's ways. Palmerston had already been chosen by God to be an instrument of good to His ancient people, to do homage to their inheritance,

> and to recognize their rights without believing their destiny. It seems he will yet do more. Though the motive be kind, it is not sound. I am forced to argue politically, financially, commercially. He weeps not, like his Master, over Jerusalem, nor prays that now, at last, she may put on her beautiful garments.[10]

As a first step, Shaftesbury persuaded Palmerston to appoint his fellow restorationist (a believer in the restoration of Palestine to the Jews) William Young as the first British vice-consul in Jerusalem. He subsequently wrote in his diary: "What a wonderful event it is! The ancient City of the people of God is about to resume a place among the nations; and England is the first of the gentile kingdoms that ceases to 'tread her down.'"[11] A year later, in 1839, Shaftesbury wrote a thirty-page article for *The London Quarterly Review*, entitled "State and Restauration (*sic*) of the Jews," in which he predicted a new era for God's chosen people. He insisted that

> the Jews must be encouraged to return in yet greater numbers and become once more the husbandman of Judea and Galilee . . . though admittedly a stiff-necked, dark hearted people, and sunk in moral degradation, obduracy, and ignorance of the Gospel, [they are] not only worthy of salvation but also vital to Christianity's hope of salvation.[12]

Shaftesbury's gentle lobbying of Palmerston proved successful. For political reasons, more than for religious ones, Palmerston too became an advocate for Jewish restoration. Among other factors that came into play in his deliberations was the "view that the Jews could be useful in buttressing the collapsing Ottoman Empire, thus helping to accomplish the key object of British foreign policy in the area."[13]

Palmerston wrote to the British ambassador in Istanbul on August 11, 1840, concerning the mutual benefit to both the Ottomans and Britain of allowing Jews to return to Palestine. Ironically, the restoration of the Jews was seen as an important means of maintaining the status quo, and of avoiding the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. Palmerston wrote:

> There exists at the present time among the Jews dispersed over Europe, a strong notion that the time is approaching when their nation is to return to Palestine . . . It would be of manifest importance to the Sultan to encourage the Jews to return and to settle in Palestine because the wealth which they would bring with them would increase the resources of the Sultan's dominions; and the Jewish people, if returning under the sanction and protection and at the invitation of the Sultan, would be a check upon any future evil designs of Mohamet Ali or his successor . . . I have to instruct Your Excellency strongly to recommend [the Turkish government] to hold out every just encouragement to the Jews of Europe to return to Palestine.[14]

Mohamet Ali, more popularly known as Muhammad Ali, was the governor of Egypt who ceded from the Ottoman Empire in the first half of the nineteenth century. When Palmerston wrote this letter to his ambassador in Istanbul, it was after a decade in which the Egyptian ruler had nearly toppled the sultan himself. The idea that Jewish wealth exported to Palestine would strengthen the Ottoman Empire from potential internal and external enemies underlines how Zionism was associated with anti-Semitism, British imperialism, and theology.

A few days after Lord Palmerston sent his letter, a lead article in *The Times* called for a plan "to plant the Jewish people in the land of their fathers," claiming this was under "serious political consideration" and commending the efforts of Shaftesbury as the author of the plan, which, it argued, was "practical and statesmanlike."[15] Lady Palmerston also supported her husband's stance. She wrote to a friend: "We have on our side the fanatical and religious elements, and you know what a following they have in this country. They are absolutely determined that Jerusalem and the whole of Palestine shall be reserved for the Jews to return to; this is their only longing to restore the Jews."[16] Thus the Earl of Shaftesbury was described as: "The leading proponent of Christian Zionism in the nineteenth century and the first politician of stature to attempt to prepare the way for Jews to establish a homeland in Palestine."[17]

This moment of British establishment enthusiasm for the idea of restoration should properly be described as proto-Zionism. While we should be careful about reading contemporary ideology into this nineteenth-century phenomenon, it nevertheless had all the ingredients that would turn these ideas into the future justification for erasing and denying the basic rights of

the indigenous Palestinian population. There were of course churches and clergymen who did identify with the local Palestinians. Notable among them was George Francis Popham Blyth, a Church of England cleric who, along with some high church Anglican colleagues, developed strong sympathies for the Palestinians' aspirations and rights. In 1887 Blyth founded St. George College, which is today probably still one of the best high schools in East Jerusalem (attended by the children of the local elite, who would play a crucial role in Palestinian politics in the first half of the twentieth century). The power, however, was with those who supported the Jewish cause, later to become the Zionist cause.

The first British consulate in Jerusalem opened in 1838. Its brief included informally encouraging Jews to come to Palestine, promising to protect them, and in some cases attempting to convert them to Christianity. The most well-known of the early consuls was James Finn (1806–72), whose character and direct approach made it impossible to conceal the implications of this brief from the local Palestinians. He wrote openly, and was probably the first to do so, about the connection between returning the Jews to Palestine and the possible displacement of the Palestinians as a result.[18] This connection would be at the heart of the Zionist settler colonial project in the following century.

Finn was stationed in Jerusalem between 1845 and 1863. He has been lauded by later Israeli historians for helping Jews to settle in their ancestral land, and his memoirs have been translated into Hebrew. He is not the only historical figure to have appeared in one nation's pantheon and in the rogues' gallery of another. Finn detested Islam as a whole and the notables of Jerusalem in particular. He never learned to speak Arabic and communicated via an interpreter, which did nothing to smooth his relationship with the local Palestinian population.

Finn was helped by the inauguration of the Anglican bishopric in Jerusalem in 1841, headed by Michael Solomon Alexander (a convert from Judaism), and by the inauguration of Christ Church, the first Anglican church, near Jaffa Gate, Jerusalem, in 1843. Although these institutions later developed a strong affinity with the Palestinian right of self-determination, at the time they supported Finn's proto-Zionist aspirations. Finn worked more eagerly than any other European to establish a

permanent Western presence in Jerusalem, organizing the purchase of lands and real estate for missionaries, commercial interests, and government bodies.

An important link connecting these early, mainly British, Christian Zionist buds with Zionism was the German Temple Pietist movement (later known as the Templers), active in Palestine from the 1860s to the outbreak of World War I. The Pietist movement grew out of the Lutheran movement in Germany that spread all over the world, including to North America (where its influence on the early settler colonialism is felt to this very day). Its interest in Palestine evolved around the 1860s. Two German clergymen, Christoph Hoffman and Georg David Hardegg, founded the Temple Society in 1861. They had strong connections to the Pietist movement in Württemberg, Germany, but developed their own ideas on how best to push forward their version of Christianity. For them, the rebuilding of a Jewish temple in Jerusalem was an essential step in the divine scheme for redemption and absolution. More importantly, they were convinced that if they themselves settled in Palestine they would precipitate the second coming of the Messiah.[19] While not everyone in the respective churches and national organizations welcomed their particular way of translating Pietism into settler colonialism in Palestine, senior members of the Royal Prussian court and several Anglican theologians in Britain enthusiastically supported their dogma.

As the Temple movement grew in prominence, it came to be persecuted by most of the established church in Germany. But they moved their ideas on to a more practical stage and settled in Palestine—fighting with each other along the way, as well as adding new members. They founded their first colony on Mount Carmel in Haifa in 1866 and expanded into other parts of the country. The warming of the relationship between Kaiser Wilhelm II and the sultan at the very end of the nineteenth century further enhanced their settlement project. The Templers remained in Palestine under the British Mandate until 1948, when they were kicked out by the new Jewish state.

The Templers' colonies and methods of settlement were emulated by the early Zionists. While the German historian Alexander Scholch described the Templers' colonization efforts as "The Quiet Crusade," the

early Zionist colonies established from 1882 onwards were anything but quiet.[20] By the time the Templers settled in Palestine, Zionism had already become a notable political movement in Europe. Zionism was, in a nutshell, a movement asserting that the problems of the Jews of Europe would be solved by colonizing Palestine and creating a Jewish state there. These ideas germinated in the 1860s in several places in Europe, inspired by the Enlightenment, the 1848 "Spring of Nations," and later on by socialism. Zionism was transformed from an intellectual and cultural exercise into a political project through the visions of Theodor Herzl, in response to a particularly vile wave of anti-Jewish persecution in Russia in the late 1870s and early 1880s, and to the rise of anti-Semitic nationalism in the west of Europe (where the infamous Dreyfus trial revealed how deeply rooted anti-Semitism was in French and German society).

Through Herzl's efforts and those of like-minded Jewish leaders, Zionism became an internationally recognized movement. Independently at first, a group of Eastern European Jews developed similar notions about the solution for the Jewish question in Europe, and they did not wait for international recognition. They began to settle in Palestine in 1882, after preparing the ground by working in communes in their home countries. In the Zionist jargon they are called the First Aliyah—the first wave of Zionist immigration lasting to 1904. The second wave (1905–14) was different, since it mainly included frustrated communists and socialists who now saw Zionism not only as a solution for the Jewish problem but also as spearheading communism and socialism through collective settlement in Palestine. In both waves, however, the majority preferred to settle in Palestinian towns, with only a smaller number attempting to cultivate land they bought from Palestinians and absentee Arab landowners, at first relying on Jewish industrialists in Europe to sustain them, before seeking a more independent economic existence.

While the Zionist connection with Germany proved insignificant at the end of the day, the one with Britain became crucial. Indeed, the Zionist movement needed strong backing because the people of Palestine began to realize that this particular form of immigration did not bode well for their future in the country. Local leaders felt it would have a very negative effect on their society. One such figure was the mufti of Jerusalem,

Tahir al-Hussayni II, who linked Jewish immigration into Jerusalem with a European challenge to the city's Muslim sanctity. Some of his elders had already noted that it was James Finn's idea to connect the arrival of the Jews with the restoration of Crusader glory. No wonder, then, that the mufti led the opposition to this immigration, with a special emphasis on the need to refrain from selling land to such projects. He recognized that possession of land vindicated claims of ownership, whereas immigration without settlement could be conceived as transient pilgrimage.[21]

Thus, in many ways, the strategic imperial impulse of Britain to use the Jewish return to Palestine as a means of deepening London's involvement in the "Holy Land" coincided with the emergence of new cultural and intellectual visions of Zionism in Europe. For both Christians and Jews, therefore, the colonization of Palestine was seen as an act of return and redemption. The coincidence of the two impulses produced a powerful alliance that turned the anti-Semitic and millenarian idea of transferring the Jews from Europe to Palestine into a real project of settlement at the expense of the native people of Palestine. This alliance became public knowledge with the proclamation of the Balfour Declaration on November 2, 1917—a letter from the British foreign secretary to the leaders of the Anglo-Jewish community in effect promising them full support for the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Thanks to the accessibility and efficient structure of the British archives, today we are blessed with many excellent scholarly works exploring the background to the declaration. Still among the best of them is an essay from 1970 by Mayer Verte, of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.[22] He showed in particular how British officials asserted wrongly that Jewish members in the Bolshevik movement had similar aspirations to the Zionists, and that therefore a pro-Zionist declaration would pave the way for good relations with the new political power in Russia. More to the point was the assumption of these policy makers that such a gesture would be welcomed by the American Jews, whom the British suspected of having a great influence in Washington. There was also a mixture of millenarianism and Islamophobia: David Lloyd George, the prime minister at the time and a devout Christian, favored the return of the Jews on a religious basis, and strategically both he and his colleagues preferred a

Jewish colony to a Muslim one, as they saw the Palestinians, in the Holy Land.

More recently we have had access to an even more comprehensive analysis, written in 1939, but lost for many years before it reappeared in 2013. This is the work of the British journalist, J. M. N Jeffries, *Palestine: The Reality*, which runs to more than 700 pages explaining what lay behind the Balfour Declaration.[23] It reveals, through Jeffries' personal connections and his access to a wide range of no-longer-extant documents, precisely who in the British admiralty, army and government was working for the declaration and why. It appears that the pro-Zionist Christians in his story were far more enthusiastic than the Zionists themselves about the idea of British sponsorship of the colonization process in Palestine.

The bottom line of all the research hitherto conducted on the declaration is that the various decision makers in Britain saw the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine as coinciding with British strategic interests in the area. Once Britain had occupied Palestine, this alliance allowed the Jews to build the infrastructure for a Jewish state under British auspices, while protected by His Majesty's Government's bayonets.

But Palestine was not easily taken. The British campaign against the Turks lasted almost the whole of 1917. It began well, with the British forces storming through the Sinai Peninsula, but they were then held up by an attritional trench war in the lines between the Gaza Strip and Bir Saba. Once this stalemate was broken, it became easier—in fact, Jerusalem surrendered without a fight. The ensuing military occupation brought all three discrete processes—the emergence of Zionism, Protestant millenarianism, and British imperialism—to Palestinian shores as a powerful fusion of ideologies that destroyed the country and its people over the next thirty years.

There are those who would like to question whether the Jews who settled in Palestine as Zionists in the aftermath of 1918 were really the descendants of the Jews who had been exiled by Rome 2,000 years ago. It began with popular doubts cast by Arthur Koestler (1905–83), who wrote *The Thirteenth Tribe* (1976) in which he advanced the theory that the Jewish settlers were descended from the Khazars, a Turkish nation of the

Caucasus that converted to Judaism in the eighth century and was later forced to move westward.[24] Israeli scientists have ever since tried to prove that there is a genetic connection between the Jews of Roman Palestine and those of present-day Israel. Nevertheless, the debate continues today.

More serious analysis came from biblical scholars who were not influenced by Zionism, such as Keith Whitelam, Thomas Thompson, and the Israeli scholar, Israel Finkelstein, all of whom reject the Bible as a factual account of any significance.[25] Whitelam and Thompson also doubt the existence of anything like a nation in biblical times and, like others, criticize what they call the "invention of modern Israel" as the work of pro-Zionist Christian theologians. The latest and most updated deconstruction of this idea came in Shlomo Sand's two books, *The Invention of the Jewish People* and *The Invention of the Land of Israel*.[26] I respect and appreciate this scholarly effort. Politically, however, I think it is less significant than the assumption that denies the existence of the Palestinians (although it is the complement of that assumption). People are entitled to invent themselves, as so many national movements have done in their moment of inception. But the problem becomes acute if the genesis narrative leads to political projects such as genocide, ethnic cleansing, and oppression.

In the particular case of the claims of nineteenth-century Zionism, it is not the historical accuracy of those claims that matters. What matters is not whether the present Jews in Israel are the authentic descendants of those who lived in the Roman era, but rather the state of Israel's insistence that it represents all the Jews in the world and that everything it does is for their sake and on their behalf. Until 1967, this claim was very helpful for the state of Israel. Jews around the world, in particular in the United States, became its main supporters whenever its policies were questioned. In many respects, this is still the case in the United States today. However, even there, as well as in other Jewish communities, this clear association is nowadays challenged.

Zionism, as we shall see in the next chapter, was originally a minority opinion among Jews. In making the argument that the Jews were a nation belonging to Palestine and therefore should be helped to return to it, they had to rely on British officials and, later, military power. Jews and the